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ABSTRACT

In response to trends toward greater accountability expectations for educational programs, a study evaluated the success of the implementation of Ohio's Individual Career Plan (ICP). The ICP is a document initiated by students no later than grade 8 that helps to outline initial career goals and educational plans to reach those goals. A core standard and performance measure was designed and has been in place since 1994. Through an interval sample process, 2 percent of the state's students in grades 8, 10, and 12 are interviewed each year about their career goals, the courses they plan to take in high school to reach those goals, and what they plan to do after high school to reach the goals. It is expected that at least 75 percent of students will be able to articulate career goals and appropriate educational paths to reach those goals; in 1998, 87-91 percent of students responded appropriately. Comparisons of districts with and without ICPs indicated that students with ICPs were more able to articulate career goals. ICP programs' annual reports document program success with quantitative student data, major program accomplishments, and at least one outstanding achievement. Self-directed professional growth for career coordinators also is encouraged as part of the overall effort to make Ohio's career development program accountable and continuously improving. (KC)

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American Association For Career Education

AACE Bonus Brief

Ohio's Accountability System for Career Development: How Do We Know We Make a Difference?

Cynthia Gahris

In the 1980s, the second decade of Ohio's Career Development Program, a question was continually asked by state decision makers of our career development personnel: How do we know that career activities we promote make any difference in the career decision-making abilities of a student? In some ways, that question is like asking how we know a health curriculum produces healthier students. However, it is clear that in this era of accountability, career development initiatives need to be measurable. This fourth and final article on Ohio's Career Development Program will explain some of the accountability measures our program uses.

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A previous article described Ohio's Individual Career Plan (ICP), a document initiated by students no later than grade 8 that helps to outline initial career goals and educational plans to reach those goals. Students have the opportunity to review and revise their ICPs at least annually in high school. To measure the success of this initiative, we designed a core standard and performance measure that has been in place since 1994.

Through an interval sample process, 2% of the state's students in grades 8, 10, and 12 are interviewed each year. Students are asked three questions: What is(are) your career goals(s)? What courses or classes do you plan to take in high school to reach the goal(s)? What do you plan to do after high school to reach the goal(s)? For responses to be acceptable, two criteria must be met. First, the career goal has to be legal and income-producing. Second, the responses to the last two questions must be appropriate for the student's career goal.

It is expected that at least 75% of students in grades 8, 10, and 12 will be able to articulate career goals and appropriate educational paths to reach those goals. Statewide, in 1998, 87% of students in grade 8 responded appropriately, that is, their responses met the above criteria. Eighty-eight percent of students in grade 10 and 91% of students in grade 12 responded appropriately.

The career coordinator for each program is responsible for the interview process in that program's school districts. Some coordinators do the interviews themselves, while others use volunteers, graduate students from schools of education, or school personnel. Exact student responses are documented. Regardless of who conducts interviews, the career coordinator reads the responses and determines whether they are appropriate. The core standard is often a topic of professional development for career coordinators, so we can ensure as much consistency in evaluating responses as possible.

We have been interviewing students since 1994, and have learned a lot during this process. In the early phase-in period of the ICP, some programs made comparisons of districts with upper-grade students with ICPs and districts that had not phased in ICPs with upper-grade students. Findings indicated that more students with ICPs were able to articulate career goals. Career coordinators now have 5 years of comparison data for their programs. When they find differences among districts or buildings, they use the information to determine variables in career development activities.

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In addition to the interview questions for the core standard, we ask other career questions. Students in grade 10 and 12 are asked if their career goals have changed since grade 8. We find that about 50% of students have fairly consistent career goals from grade 8 to high school graduation. The point is not to track these students, but rather, simply to provide us with more information.

Students in grade 12 are asked a series of questions about the next step after high school. We are trying to determine if students are simply verbalizing plans, or if they have taken action. So, if a student responds with college, we ask if the student has applied, been accepted, and has a starting date. The same kinds of questions are asked of students who indicate they are going directly to employment, apprenticeship, or the military. This is only the second year for these questions, so we do not have true data yet to report. We also ask students in grade 12 to indicate the career activity and/or the individual that has had the greatest impact on their career choices. From last year's data, it appears that students felt job shadowing experiences made the biggest impact on their career choices. We have improved the reporting techniques this year, so we hope to have more accurate data for both of these questions.

Other measures of program accountability include a grant application and an annual report for each program. Both documents focus on the seven core functions for which coordinators are responsible: coordination of staff and activities, career assessment, staff development, curriculum, instructional materials, community involvement, and career information.

Grant applications, written every 2 years, must reflect continuous improvement. Each is read by at least two people, including career development state staff and career coordinators. By reading other applications, career coordinators gain ideas. Outstanding grant applications are made available to any career coordinator who wants to read them.

The annual reports include a large section on data collection, including such as the numbers of students with ICPs and Career Passports, career assessment data, and the core standard information, as well as elementary school activities. These reports provide quantitative student data that have become so important in this era of accountability. Each report also includes major program accomplishments and at least one Outstanding Achievement. The Outstanding Achievements are collated (by the seven core functions mentioned above) and distributed to career coordinators in the fall. This is one more way to share best ideas. This year, we are asking each career coordinator to select an outstanding Career Passport developed by a graduating senior. We will then make the Career Passports available to career coordinators to use as examples with educators to strengthen this process.

Over the years, we have also developed a document called *A Self-Directed Professional Growth Model for the Career Coordinator*. This provides a continuous improvement document for the professional development of the career coordinator. Unlike most of our other professional development activities, this document is designed to be done alone. It helps the career coordinator to choose areas for professional growth. We have also provided this document on request to local administrators to help them develop career coordinator job descriptions, or to use in matching candidates to the job of career coordinator.

Ohio has not maintained its career development program for 30 years by chance alone. Through excellent people resources in the career coordinators, and through accountability and flexibility, our program has not only survived but thrived. A common theme we often use in program materials is: Who can say when a dream begins? In Ohio, we are doing all we can to ensure that every student's career dream becomes a reality.

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